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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the importance of book contests and book awards in Thailand, especially the National Book Awards announced during the National Book Week. The results of an analysis of the fiction and nonfiction national award books by author, content, and subject are discussed in order to show how these highly recognized books are quality information resources. A study of the availability of these national award books in some leading academic, school, public, and national libraries is also presented. The findings offer suggestions for improving book production in Thailand, enhancing the value of national award books, and making information professionals and users aware of these quality information resources and putting them to the best use. (Author/MES)

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# National Award Books as Quality Information Resources in Thailand

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## Abstract

*This paper deals with the importance of book contests and book awards in Thailand, especially the National Book Awards announced during the National Book Week. The results of an analysis of the national award books both fiction and non fiction by author, content and subject are discussed, to show how these highly recognized books are quality information resources. The study of the availability of these national award books in some leading academic, school, public and national libraries are also presented. The findings offer suggestions for improving book production in Thailand, enhancing the value of national award books and making information professionals and users aware of these quality information resources and putting them to the best use.*

*Keywords: National Award Books/ Book Contests/ Information Resources/ Reading Sources*

## Paper

## 1. Introduction

The importance of book contests and literary awards for promoting book development is globally recognized. Literary awards encourage those in the literary world to produce works of high quality, stimulate the publishing of good books and make known literary works especially of book award winners. However, values of literary awards may differ according to

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the conditions of book production, the book market and the reading habit of the people in the country. In Thailand, literary awards not only stimulate and encourage writers and publishers to produce qualify works and to promote the use of their books, but also reflect literary trends and book reading of the people in the country.

Awards for good literary works was started in Thailand in 1907, by the Archeology Society. A major task of the Society was to select good books both old and new for publishing, award them recognition as the nation's literature and publicize them. Similar activities have been carried on by various institutions for these past ninety years. Occasionally and yearly, organizations from both government and private sectors in Thailand organize book contests, and award prizes for good books. The only national book awards in Thailand are bestowed during The National Book Week. These awards were introduced in 1972.

## 2. The National Book Award

During the International Book Year 1972, Thailand as a member of UNESCO organized many activities responding to UNESCO's campaign for the recognition of the important role of books in bringing about enlightenment, international understanding and hopefully, prosperity to society and mankind. The National Book Contest was organized as a cooperative book promotion program with the National Book Week. The national book contest in Thailand today is organized by the National Book Development Committee, with the main objectives to: (National Book Development Committee , 2540)

1. Stimulate those in the book production field (author, publisher,printer etc.) to produce valuable and useful works.

2. Enable those who engage in the distribution of books, diffusion of knowledge and promotion of use of knowledge and information (librarians, information professionals, and readers) to have more choices in the selection of good books.

Each year, rules for the contest are issued, specifying the qualifications of the applicant, types and qualifications of the books summitted, details on the selection of the winners and the prizes. The rules are distributed to all who engage in book publishing in the country, inviting them to join the contest. Nine types of adult and children's books are included. The adult books are fiction, non fiction, poetry and short stories. The children's books are books for new readers (3-5 years old), books for small chidren (6-11 years old), and books for pre-teenagers (12-14 years old). The other two types are the cartoon books and books reflecting aesthetic values. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, 2541)

The books summitted to the contest are distributed to a committee of specialists in specific types of books. Each member of the committee reads all the books assigned and evaluates them according to their qualities. There are years when there are no awards for titles under specific categories as they do not measure up to the standard. The results of the contest are announced to the public through the mass media.

The following points serve as guidelines for the evaluation of each type of book being considered for the National Book Award: (National Book Development Committee, 2540)

1. non fiction : main idea, reasonableness, correctness, style, endeavour of the author.
2. novel: contents, literary values and usefulness.
3. poetry: beauty, forms and ideas.
4. short story : contents, literary values, usefulness.
5. children's book: values and usefulness for the child's life, promotion of creative thinking, use of language, style, suitability for assigned child's age, format and illustrations.
6. cartoon books: contents, correlation of contents and pictures and usefulness.
7. books reflecting aesthetic values: the artistic design as seen from format, cover, printing,

lay out, illustration etc.
8. all types of book: details of printing (proof reading, printing, binding etc.)

## 3. The National Award Books

The national award books are products of quality passed through the judgement of all those concerned, from publishers to book speciatists. Each year over 300 books are selected by publishers to enter in the national book contest, and about 30 books are selected for the award. (Book production in Thailand came to 9,600 titles per year) (Landscape in Asian Publishing, 1997) From 1972, the first year of the National Book Award to the present (1998), there were 778 books of all types which won awards, consisting of 241 adult books, 235 children's books and other 302 books scattered among other categories. Although each of the award books were recognized for their values, there were some features that deprived them from being the nation's quality information resources.

### 3.1 An analysis of the national award books

An analysis of the contents and authors of the 169 national award books for adults, consisting of 80 non fiction books and 89 novels, revealed a limitation in contents and authorship of these award books to qualify as quality information resources.

Non fiction. The 80 non fiction books classified by contents using the Dewey Decimal Classification System showed that the number of books by subjects varied. The highest number of titles were in history (47.50%) followed by the social sciences (15.00%). The rest (37.50%) were scattered in 8 subject areas, with their number of titles as follows: Arts (7), Literature (6), Religion (5), Applied science (4), Miscellaneous (3), Philosophy and Science (2 each) and Language (1)

These non fiction books classified by subdivision of the D.D.C. are in 25 subject areas (from 100) which indicated more clearly a limitation in subject coverage. The books clustered in 5 subjects: geography and travels (22), biography (11) Thai literature (6), Asia (5), Thai customs and folklore (5), which added up to 49 books (61.25%) The other 31 books covered 20 subjects, each comprised of 1-3 books.

As for the authorship, an analysis of the 80 authors of non fiction books showed wider coverage of authors than that of the novels.The non fiction books were the works of 62 authors and 5 corporate authors. Among them, 8 authors and 1 corporate author wrote more than one book. The number of books written by each of them varied from 2 to 3 titles. However, in some subject areas such as Arts and Buddhism one or a few authors dominated the scene.

The findings indicated that in some subject areas some authors were so skillful and experienced that they won the awards many times. Unfortunately, there were not many writers of non fiction books and for some subject areas many of them could not produce highly qualify works.

Novels. An analysis by contents and themes of 89 award novels showed that the highest number was the sociological novel (32.58%) dealing with both city and country people. The second major group was the romantic novel (25.84%) dealing with family lives and lives of young people. The other 41.58% covered novels in 10 categories. Each category consisted of 2-6 books: in the following areas with the number of titles written: heroic novel (6), the Chinese in Thailand (6), historical novels (5), fantasy (4), hill tribes (4), exotic novels (4), novels of ideas (3), teenagers' lifes (2), drugs (2) and nature (2).

These 89 national award novels were the works of 39 authors. Fourteen authors had written more than one award novel. Three authors among them having won 10-15 award novels (under various pen names). Their works added up to 36 books (40.45%). Eleven authors owned 2-5

national award novels each, which added up to 28 books (31.46%), 25 authors owned one award novel each.

The findings showed that a number of authors more or less had a monopoly of the national award novels. The facts reflect the publishing scenes and the market for novels in Thailand. There are not many novelists and there is a lack of talent among the new generation. The authors who were frequently awarded for their works were outstanding writers with long time experiences in their career. They were also very popular among readers. As this group of novelists had their works published regularly and summitted to the contest in large numbers, they had more chances to win the awards than the less esperiences young generation of novelists who hardly had their works published or had them published by small publishers who could not produce books of high quality.

The limitation of the number of writers resulted in the limitation of contents, styles, and the use of languages in the awarded novels which could be concluded as a comment on Thai writing by an outstanding literary critic that "The Thai novel lags behind other forms of writings." (M.L. Boonlua Dhepayasuwan, 2539) An analysis of contents and themes of the awarded novels found that they represent the themes of the novels that are popular among the readers. Considering the style and language of these novels; as individual author has his/her specific style of writing, (M.L. Boonlua Dhepayasuwan, 2539) a small number of the awardees resulted in the lack of newness and variety in style and the use of language that readers should expect and enjoy.

### 3.2 The Availability of national award books in libraries

The survey of card catalogs and of online public access catalogs (OPAC) in the National Library, public, university and school libraries showed a disparity in the number of holdings of national award books available in these libraries. The university libraries and the national library have most of the national award books, the school libraries have about a fifth to a half of the titles, and the public libraries have the least number of titles.

**Academic libraries.** Results of the survey of the collections of national award books in libraries of four leading universities showed that libraries in these universities (central and faculty libraries) provided the majority of the national award books, ranging from 86.36% to 96.97%, and each of them owned 1-10 copies of each title. The number of books provided divided by type were: novels 83.15%-98.88%, short stories 79.31%-93.10%, and non fiction books 87.50%-97.50%.

| Universities | Novels (89) | | Short Stories (29) | | Non fiction (80) | | Total (198) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Chulalongkorn | 88 | 98.88 | 27 | 93.10 | 78 | 97.5 | 192 | 96.97 |
| Thammasat | 82 | 92.13 | 23 | 79.31 | 76 | 95.00 | 181 | 91.41 |
| Srinakarinwirot (Prasarnmitr) | 85 | 95.51 | 26 | 89.66 | 71 | 88.75 | 182 | 91.92 |
| Silpakorn | 74 | 83.15 | 27 | 93.10 | 70 | 87.50 | 171 | 86.36 |

**National Library.** Thai National Library serves as a national and public library. According to the Print Act, it is a depository library that must have all publications published in the country and should receive five copies of all the national award books according to the national book contest regulations (National Book Development Committee, 2541) However, the survey revealed that of the 198 national award books studied only 178 titles (89.90%) are available in the national library, consisting of 80 novels, 21 short stories and 77 non fiction books.

**Public Libraries.** The public library services in Bangkok are under the jurisdiction of the

Bangkok Metropolis. Twelves libraries in the system acquire the same titles of publications and offer the same kinds of services to all people. A survey of the national award books from the card catalogs in Suan Lumpini Public Library, the main branch of the system showed that the public libraries in Bangkok have only 48 titles of national award books (24.24%) available in their libraries. The collection consists of 27 novels and 21 non fiction books. No short stories were available.

**School Libraries.** A survey of national award novels and non fiction books in five school libraries that received the best secondary school library award for the year 1994-1998 from Thai Library Association showed that these schools have a small number (18.34%-53.85%) of national award novels and non fiction books in their libraries. The proportion of the books are 21.35%-47.19% of novels and 15.00%-61.25% of non fiction books. These figures showed that young people have limited access to these quality information resouces from school libraries which are the nearest reading places for them.

| School Libraries | Novels (89) | | Non fiction (80) | | Total (169) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Wat Rajadhivas School | 24 | 26.97 | 17 | 21.25 | 41 | 24.26 |
| Wat Baworamongkala School | 32 | 35.96 | 20 | 25.00 | 52 | 30.77 |
| Benjamarajalai School | 19 | 21.35 | 12 | 15.00 | 31 | 18.34 |
| Bodindeja School | 42 | 47.19 | 49 | 61.25 | 91 | 53.85 |
| Bangkapi School | 35 | 39.33 | 30 | 37.50 | 65 | 38.46 |

## 4. National award books and the readers

A survey of 92 students enrolled in literary courses (65 from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and 27 from the Faculty of Arts, Thammasat University) showed that the majority (60.22%) read 1-10 titles (0.5%-5.05%) of the national award books studied. The highest number of students (36.96%) read 1-5 titles (0.5%-2.53%), and 2.17% among them have never read any national award book. The survey also showed that the students read the national award novels more than the short stories and non fiction books. However, the number of the titles they read was not high. Most of them (76.09%) read 1-10 novels (1.12% - 11.24%). As for short stories, the highest number of students (58.70%) read 1-5 titles (3.45% -17.24%), and 29.35% among them have never read any national award short stories.

Result of the student's reading of national award non fiction book was different. The majority of the students (54.35%) have never read any national award non fiction books. The highest number of students who read the national award non fiction books (40.22%) read only 1-5 titles (1.25%-6.25%). The data above indicated that the national award books were not popular, resulting in neglect and insufficient use of these quality information resources.

## 5. Problems of the national award books as quality information resources

The results from a sketchy analysis of contents and themes of the national award books, the survey of the availability of the award books in some leading libraries and the survey of the reading of the national award books revealed that the national award books are over looked as quality information resources of the nation and therefore are not fully used.

The problems identified under the following categories are: the national award books, the reading sources and the publicity.

### 5.1 national award books

non fiction

- limited subject matter (mostly biography and travels)
- a need for books covering in depth a variety of subjects.
- authors of books in some subjects (ex. arts and Buddhism) are limited to one or a few authors resulting in the limitation of ideas and viewpoints.

novel

- the contents and themes require variety (most titles are on social problems and love)
- outstanding novelists have a monopoly of the awards and the book market, their specific style of writing, resulting in the lack of newness and variety in the novels awarded.

### 5.2 reading sources

The survey of 4 types of libraries showed that there were more or less problems affecting the use of the national award books as quality information resources in the libraries.

academic libraries

- no arrangement of the national award books as seperate collection or identification to point to titles which are national award books in some libraries.
- lack of publicity of the national award books in the libraries (no indication in the catalog cards, and in bibligraphic database etc.)
- some national award books are kept as reserve books in some libraries with no spare copies for the general readers.

national libraries

- incomplete collection of the national award books.
- no special arrangement for the national award books as resources for study and research or identification to point to titles which are award books.

public libraries

- very small number of the national award books.
- the national award books are not maintained in good condition.
- no arrangement of the national award books as separate collection. or identification to point to titles which are award books.
- no indication of their importance as the national award books.

school libraries

- small number of the national award books in the collection.
- no arrangement of the national award books as separate collection.
- no guidance offered in using award books as quality information resources.
- lack of publicity and promotion on the importance of award books as quality information resources.

### 5.3 publicity

The national award books are not popular among Thai people especially the non fiction books. The factors causing the problems are:

- small and incomplete collections of the national award books in the libraries.
- lack of publicity and information about the national award books in libraries.
- not much news, book reviews, book talks or panel discussions on national award books in the media.
- organizations concerned with reading and education do not promote the use of the national award books.
- many national award books, especially those published earlier are out of print.

## 6. Suggestions

Books which have received national award can qualify as important information resources if the following suggestions are implemented :

### 6.1 book contests

- new forms of book contests should be organized.
  - non fiction book contests on specific subject (the rare and useful ones such as sports, science and nature)
  - fiction contests on specific theme (in particular, themes for which there are few books or useful for the public)
  - book contests limited to new authors.
  - book contests based on readers' opinion (wholly or partly)
- support for new authors, encouraging them to join the book contests.
- the committee for judging books for national awards should consist of specialists from various disciplines and experiences and be rotatable.

### 6.2 reading sources

national library
- takes action in proposing the revision of the Print Act to make it effective or assumes depository of copies of books.
- demand for all publications from publishers according to the Print Act.
- demand for all the national award books from the publishers according to the national book contest regulations.
- organize a special collection of the national award books for study and research.
- special identification of national award books in the library catalog cards and on the online public access catalog (OPAC)

public libraries
- a continual acquisition of the national award books (acquire some useful selected titles if not possible to acquire all of them)
- promoting the use of these national award books among library users.

school libraries
- acquisition of national award books useful for enriching education and experiences of students and teachers.
- promoting the use of the national award books among students in cooperation with the teachers through book reports, book talks etc.

academic libraries
- acquisition of all titles of the national award books that are missing to make complete collections, and revise them annually.
- provision of information on the existence of these national award books in the library (lists, displays, bulletin boards etc.)

### 6.3 publicity

- publishers, copyright owners, and all sectors engaged in the national award books campaign for the publishing, reprinting books that are out of print.
- libraries publicizing the national award books through news on bulletin boards, book lists, annotations, library newsletters, book displays and conducting book talks by authors, book panel discussions etc.
- mass media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines) publicize news and information about the national award books (not only results of the national book awards) occasionally or for special events and conduct book discussions, book talks, interview with authors etc.

## 7. Conclusions

Although the national award books are generally recognized for their quality the study of 198 national award adult books from 1972 to 1998, and the survey of their availability in some leading libraries showed some limitations that deprived them from being recognized and used as quality information resources. The non fiction books are restricted to a small number of subject areas and in excess in some subjects; there should be an even spread of a variety of subjects. The novels were repetitions in themes and authors. These situations resulted in the limitation of ideas and no challenges. The national award book collections available in libraries were incomplete or were very small and not in good condition. Problems arose from many sources, the books, the reading sources, and the publicity. Suggestions to solve the problems and to improve the national award books to be quality information resources were to initiate new forms of contests, improve the availability of the national award books in all types of libraries and publicize their values and existence to all. Libraries need to initiate "user education and user friendly" activities to put these national award quality resources to wider use. If all these suggestions are accomplished the national award books in Thailand would be a true nation's quality information resources.

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